

VZCZCXRO4647
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0203/01 0421057
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 111057Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0958
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 1063
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1931
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2198
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000203

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/19/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ARMY COMMANDER SAYS AMR MOUSSA WILL
ACCOMPLISH NOTHING, ARMY REMAINS STRONG

REF: BEIRUT 195

BEIRUT 00000203 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a February 8th introductory office call, Lebanese Army Commander Michel Sleiman warmly welcomed Ambassador. Sleiman did not think that the February 7-9 trip by Arab League SYG Amr Moussa would accomplish anything other than a framework for more discussions. Sleiman gave a brief overview of Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) operations over the last three years, stressing the continued unity of the Army. While the demonstrations and subsequent shooting of civilians by the LAF on January 27th have caused tension, Sleiman has taken positive action to address the situation. Sleiman said that he is ready for the demonstrations on the week of February 14th. The LAF intends to nominate candidates for attendance at U.S. Military Service Academies for 2008.
End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador and Defense Attache met with Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Lieutenant General Michel Sleiman on February 8 at LAF headquarters in Yarze. LAF Lieutenant Colonel Edmond Homsy also attended from the Lebanese side. The atmosphere of the meeting was cordial.

AMR MOUSSA IS HERE AGAIN
"NOTHING WILL HAPPEN"

13. (C) Sleiman told us that nothing would happen during the visit of Amr Moussa (Reftel), which was going on at the time of the meeting. Sleiman was circumspect and dour simultaneously on the topic. When prodded, Sleiman told us that there would be no solution with the exception of establishing a framework for further discussions. Sleiman says that the problem resides in the details of any agreement which include actual names for ministerial portfolios.

THANK YOU UNITED STATES

YOU HAVE HELPED OUR ARMY

14. (C) Quickly moving away from any discussion of politics, Sleiman used this occasion to thank the USG for its support of the LAF. Sleiman feels this support is well placed as the Lebanese Army is an example for other armies in the region because of its multiconfessional makeup. Speaking proudly, Sleiman extolled the strength and unity of the Army during the last three years since the assassination of former PM Rafic Hariri which spawned the Cedar Revolution and led to the withdrawal of 35,000 Syrian troops from Lebanon after a thirty year occupation.

15. (C) During the last three years, the Army comprised of soldiers from all religious and familial sects has worked together as they assumed security responsibility for Lebanon, deployed to the southern border with Israel and defeated an al Qaeda affiliated terrorist group in a grueling war in the summer of 2007 without receiving a single additional resource from the government. Sleiman was equally proud of his Army's human rights record during all of these missions.

MORALE IN THE ARMY IS GOOD
I HAVE TALKED WITH ALL OF MY OFFICERS

16. (C) Sleiman feels that there are many people in Lebanon who would like to see the Army divided since it would serve their political needs, a clear allusion to Hizballah. He described the demonstrations on January 27th that led to the deaths of eight civilians at the hands of the LAF as an "accident." In response to these events, Sleiman summoned his officers to LAF HQ at Yarze over a three day period to speak directly to them. In an hour long discussion with several groups of officers, Sleiman stressed the importance

BEIRUT 00000203 002.2 OF 002

of sacrifice for the country, both in terms of blood and in terms of taking responsibility.

17. (C) Sleiman clearly intends to punish those officers who need to be punished for any wrongdoing they may have committed during this "small accident." In fact, Sleiman thinks "we should move on and work as we did before. I have given a strong message to my soldiers."

WEEK OF 14 FEBRUARY WILL SEE DEMONSTRATIONS
THE ARMY WILL BE READY TO DO ITS MISSION

18. (C) Commenting on the planned demonstrations for the commemoration of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on February 14th, Sleiman told Ambassador that the Army is prepared and has already begun developing contingency plans. Sleiman is also preparing messages for the media that will reinforce the Army's position on what is and is not allowed. (Comment. The Army is still in charge of security for Lebanon since former President Emile Lahoud left office and made a decree, albeit unconstitutional, that the Army was hereby in charge and could limit civilian activities that posed a threat to security. This decree is accepted by the March 8th opposition as legitimate. The March 14th group sees the LAF as receiving legitimacy for this mission from the current Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora. End Comment).

19. (C) Sleiman is convinced that there are actors who want March 8th and March 14th supporters to clash in the streets of Beirut. The speech of MP Saad Hariri on February 7th is contributing to this sense of building anger with his militant calls for action. Even so, Sleiman feels that the Army is ready to take care of this mission and keep the populace safe.

ACADEMY NOMINATIONS FOR WEST POINT, ANNAPOLIS, USAFA
WE ARE HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROGRAM

¶10. (C) In closing, Ambassador recalled Secretary Gates priority invitation for Lebanon to send cadets to the U.S. Military Service Academies. Citing a closing window of time in which nominees could submit the paperwork to compete for admittance, the Ambassador asked Sleiman if he had made any decisions. Sleiman, somewhat startled that his staff had not informed us of his decision, told us that he was happy to participate in the program since it was such a great opportunity for Lebanon to have this educational experience in its officer corps. Sleiman intends to send nominees to the Defense Attache that have completed at least one year of military training at the Lebanese Armed Forces Military Academy. He specifically stressed the fact that he wanted representation from all of the LAF Forces to include the Navy.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) It was very apparent that Sleiman did not want to talk politics in this introductory meeting; rather, he wanted to focus on his role as the Army Commander. He is careful to avoid being seen as a politically adventurous Army officer during this delicate time period. Sleiman knows that he must keep the peace in the streets and perform well as the Army commander if he ever hopes to make the half mile journey down the hill from his military headquarters at Yarze to the Presidential Palace located in Ba'abda.
SISON